

The medieval fragments of *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* – a way to a critical edition?

Florian Grammel, University of Copenhagen.

This paper concerns the application of new approaches to old editorial problems.

Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar (“The Saga of Tristram and Ísönd”) is a rather faithful Old Norse prose translation of Thomas of Brittany’s late XIIth century *Tristan* poem. It is believed to be the starting point for the rich Old Norse tradition of courtly narratives, both translated and autochthonous, and thus of great importance for the literary history of Norway and Iceland in the Middle Ages. But it is also the only completely preserved rendition of the *courtly branch* of the Tristan legend, which makes it a very important source for Arthurian research in general.

Even though we have very good reasons to believe that the saga actually was translated in the early XIIIth century in Norway and widely read in medieval times, the earliest extant manuscripts are only from late XVIIth century Iceland, and only four leaves from two XVth century vellum manuscripts shed some light on the text’s earlier transmission. Strangely enough for an obviously central text like *Tristrams saga*, no edition has been published that takes all textual witnesses into account. Neither have scholars reached a consensus on the stemma; and especially the position of the vellum fragments in it is unclear.

Given their special position in the transmission of the saga, the fragments should be the pivotal point of all stemmatic reasoning about *Tristrams saga*. Their relative shortness not only allows us, but makes it inevitable that one should extract as much information as possible from these small portions of the text, where the transmission at least “touches” the Middle Ages, when it was written.

It is thus imperative not only to use “classical” genealogical reasoning, but also more recent quantitative methods and to compare their usability and results. By doing this I will try to show how and to what extent the Medieval fragments can shed light on the relationship between the (more or less) complete early modern paper manuscripts. On basis of this, I will discuss how this knowledge can be applied to a new, critical edition of *Tristrams saga* and try to draw some general conclusions on how one can work with fragmentary and problematic text traditions.